PASSING of the ONE REELER

MAURICE COSTELLO, CONSOLIDATED

FLORENCE LAWRENCE

Bangs Photo

BY A. H. GIEBLER.

THE short-length film, the one and two reel comedies and dramas that gave us our first appetite for the movies, are passing.

The decline of the short photoplay began with the making of the first multiple reel and has been going on ever since, and such is the rapidity with which things move in the movies that it will be only a short time until there will be nothing of the tabloid films left except a few comedies, the news weeklys and the educational subjects.

If we may judge the future by the past, there is no indication that educational pictures will ever be made in longer lengths. The great American public is willing to take its entertainment in larger doses, but it seems to prefer being educated a little at a time, at least so far as pictures as a medium are concerned.

The passing of the one and two reelers has a meaning much deeper than appears on the surface. It means that the neighborhood picture show, as we once knew it, is on the same toboggan and that the two are sliding to oblivion at the same rate of speed.

The number of moving-picture theaters is growing less and less all the time. To cite an example, the City of St. Louis had more than 200 shows seven years ago. Today there are less than 100.

This does not mean that the pictures are losing their hold on the public as a means of entertainment. The fact is that they are gaining in popularity all the time, because the less than 100 theaters in St. Louis today have a combined seating capacity greater than the more than 200 of a few years ago.

The old-time nickelodeon, with its 200 and 300 seats, a lone piano player and a program of four or five single reels, is giving way to regular theaters with full orchestras, ushers in uniform and from eight to fourteen reels of each performance and an admission price from 10 to 25 cents.

The Melting Pot.

The old-fashioned neighborhood show was one of the greatest levelers and one of the most democratic institutions the country has ever known. It brought all of the people of a district together and made them acquainted with one another. It healed feuds and destroyed sectional and sectarian lines.

Before the movie show the people of each neighborhood had many kinds of entertainments, but there was always a line of lodge, church or cult—something that prevented a perfect social amalgamation.

Mrs. Jones would go down the street past where the loyal order of this, that or the other was giving a "blow-out," but she would not go in because she knew that her lodge or her church or club would be giving an entertainmeent the next week that would be even so much better than this could ever hope to be.

Mrs. Smith, moving into a new neighborhood, would make friends with the women of the district who belonged to her club or her church, and very often she got no further into the social life of the district than this.

When the movie show came it drew from all sects, all lodges, all churches. The people met on a common ground of amusement. They wept and sorrowed over the wrongs of the screen heroines and laughed at the antics of the comedians, and a great friendliness grew up among them all.

The old-time movie show healed feuds and made friends of enemies. Mrs. Snippy, making her way to the one vacant seat in the middle row of a darkened theater, stumbled over the generous feet of Mrs. Cross, her backyard enemy. And, just to show that she was not forgetful of the amenities of life if others were, she apologized politely. And Mrs. Cross, not to be outdone, grew voluble in her acceptance of the apology, and the first thing either of them knew they were chatting away like old friends every time the operator changed the reels.

And the next day they would be borrowing cups of sugar and things from one another across the back fence.

More Ornate Houses.

The cinema palaces do not make for this neighborhood feeling, and the neighborhood melting pot is not bubbling as fast and as furiously as it once did.

The average housewife does not stack the supper dishes in the sink, slick back her hair, grab little Johnny and little Genevieve and three nickels and hit the trail to the movies five or six nights a week, as she once did.

Going to the movies means dressing up in good clothes nowadays, and worse—it means twice as many nickels as it did in the early days.

Of course, the patrons of the pictures are responsible for the passing of the short films. The producers began making five and six reel features. The people liked them and began patronizing the houses that showed them.

The managers of the little theaters could not exhibit the big features, that cost all the way from $25 to $100 a day in rentals, in houses where that much money could not be taken in all evening, and as most of the managers had waxed prosperous, they began erecting larger houses—regular palaces that would accomodate as many as 2000 people—ice-aired in summer and hot-aired in winter, decorated on the inside with plush hangings and brilliantly uniformed ushers and ornamented on the outside with the architect's entire bag of tricks.

The moving-picture industry had its greatest growth—and, if the truth were told, its greatest prosperity—in the days of the one-reel film.

The little stories did not cost much to produce, and in spite of the fact that at one time twenty-five studios were turning them out as fast as they could make them, the supply did not meet the demand.

An Era of Improvement.

The first dramatic photoplay made in America was produced at the Thomas A. Edison plant. Before this the dramatic subjects all came from Europe, principally from France and Italy. These pictures were not popular after the novelty had worn off.

There were few regular picture theaters at this time, but with the coming of the American picture play, there was a great boom to the business. Theaters sprang up like mushrooms in every city, town and hamlet.

A vacant storeroom fitted out with a projection machine, a girl to sell tickets and a few dozen seats or benches and a white sheet stretched across the back would become a prosperous theater overnight. The exhibitor who painted the back wall of his building white for a screening surface was considered progressive and more than extravagent.

The one-reel plays were masterpieces of condensed action; as much story and plot were crowded into their 1000 feet as is found in many of the 5000 and 6000 foot features of today.

They were all action. The life story of the characters from the cradle to the grave had to be told in eighteen minutes, and in some cases it was done logically and artistically.

There were no waits, no padding; few subtitles were used. A story that did not tell itself in action was not used. The sentences thrown on the screen seldom had more than ten words; letters were limited to fifty words. A man going to China would write and tell his wife all about it in one paragraph.

The actors did not indulge in retrospection, introspection, or anything else. They moved through the story with dash and spirit. No precious moments were wasted by the hero putting his gloves on or getting his gloves off. Many of the early actors did not bother about such minor things as gloves at all.

They went to weddings, funerals, receptions, everything—in the same suit of clothes.

No doubt many of the conventions of good society and dress and deportment were severly shattered by the one-reelers. They were full of crudities, absurdities even, but there was a get-up-and-go to them and there was story and plot and action and pep and punch and thrill in every scene, and some of them had as many as fifty scenes.

Most of the players in the "big stuff" of today made their start in the one-reel pictures, and most of the prominent directors learned their technique in making the tabloid dramas and comedies of six and seven years ago.

David W. Griffith was a master of the one reels, and his plays were masterpieces of dramatic force and art. The same art that he put into the "Birth of a Nation" and "Intolerance" was put into the little features.

Mary Pickford, Alice Joyce, J Warren Kerrigan, the Bushman and Bayne team, the three Moore boys, G. M. Anderson, Thomas Santchi, Henry Walthall, Marguerite Snow, Carlyle Blackwell, Crane Wilbur, Pearl White, Wallace Reid, Florence Lawrence, Maurice Costello, Clara Kimball Young and dozens of others had their first screen experience in short-length pictures, and several in this list had never had any previous stage career.

The five-reel film was a natural evolution. The producers who made the 1000-foot reel tried their hands at two-reelers. Then came the three and the five. For some unexplained reason, there were but few four-reel pictures ever made.

There are few short films being made today. The old Biograph Company has stopped entirely. The Vitagraph devotes most of its time to long films.

One-reel comedies will probably always be made, because the exhibitor that makes a program of one five-reeler always wants a short-length subject to round out the bill, and as most of the long subjects are dramas, comedies are best for this purpose.

Many people deplore the passing of the short subjects. Some prophesy their return to favor. Some say they were most crude and inartistic and others say that all the fun has been taken out of going to the movies since the long films came along and made it a formal occasion—like going to the opera.

Week's Film Releases

FOX SPECIAL: Rose of Blood—This picture, starring Theda Bara, is said to concern the Russian revolution, and the part which the people of the White Empire played in bringing it about. It shows particularly the work done by a woman in over-throwing the despots who ruled the country. The story is by Richard Ordynshi, stage director of the Metropolitan Opera House of New York, and, besides playing the leading male role, the author supervised the details of art in the staging of the picture. Miss Bara plays the part of a Russian girl who casts her lot with a group of revolutionists. J. Gordon Edwards, who has directed Miss Bara in nearly all her pictures, is responsible for this production.

PATHE: Naulahka—George B. Seitz writer of a number of serial thrillers prepared the script for this eight-reel special feature from the story by Rudyard Kipling. The picture is said to breathe the spirit if Kipling, which the director, George Fitzmaurice, has caught with all the bizarre and picturesque atmosphere of India as a setting for the action. Antonio Moreno is starred in this weird production, with Doraldina, the Hawaiian dancer, formerly in vaudeville, as the chief support. Other prominent players are Warner Oland, Helen Chadwick, Mary Alden and J. H. Gilmour.

TRIANGLE: The Man Above the Law—the painted desert of New Mexico and Arizona, with much action in a settlement of Navajo Indians, forms the background for this picture. Jack Richardson is the featured player and he revels in the wild Western outfit he adopts in the characterization of a man whose manners and customs make him an unusual man in even an unusual country. In support of Richardson are Josie Sedgwick, Claire McDowell, Olga Grey, and Dark Cloud the Indian who was seen in many of the one-reel Indian thrillers in the early days.

BLUEBIRD: The Girl by the Roadside—A screen version of Varrick Vanardy's novel of the same title, with Violet Mersereau in the leading role, is this offering on the Bluebird program. In this production, the star has opportunity to wear both "raggedy" and handsome gowns, besides a chance to display her acting ability in a variety of emotions, both dramatic and humorous. Cecil Owen plays the leading male character, and Theodore Marsten directed the picture.

WHAT THE STARS ARE DOING

Myrtle Stedman has been visiting in Colorado, where she still retains ownership of a well-built log cabin near the foot of Long's Peak, where she spent many happy days with her father when he was mining in that region.

June Caprice, in trying to hit the villain over the head with a chair in a recent picture, lost her balance and gave herself an awful black eye, which delayed the picture several days until the optic regained its original coloring.

Virginia Valli, Essenay star, spends much of her spare time at the studio reading law books, although she denies having any aspirations to become a modern Portia.

Answers to Picture Fans

LILLY—Learning to write plays is like learning any other profession or trade. To be a good musician you would have to study and practice a long time before you could really make any money at it. To be a successful writer of either plays or stories, you must put in a great deal of time in study and practice. When you have good ideas for stories, put them on paper, and if they are new and original you stand as good a chance of selling them as any outside writer for the screen. Paul Willis is 17 and is with Lasky, Hollywood, Cal.

MELBA S.—Violet Mersereau may be reached through Universal, 1600 Broadway, New York. She is at the Eastern Universal studio, Mary Anderson is at the Western Vitagraph plant at Hollywood, Cal. Louise Huff and Kathlyn Williams both work at the Lasky studio, Hollywood, Cal., and Crane Wilbur at Horsley, Los Angeles. Niles Welch is about 27, and will get a letter addressed in care of Famous Players, 485 Fifth avenue, New York. Cannot say whether any of these players will send you their photographs upon request.

JAKE K.—Cannot locate Ellen Perry. Perhaps you mean Eileen Percy, who plays with Douglas Fairbanks. She is 19 and may be addressed at the Lasky studio, Hollywood, Cal. So far as we know she is single. There are various dramatic schools where the elementary principles of acting may be learned, but the best way to become an actor is to join a stock company and play any part given you for a year or two. With this experience it would not be so hard to get into a moving-picture studio.

JOE FLANNIGAN—The Tom Sawyer picture was released December 17, 1917. Jack Pickford is 21 and is Mary Pickford's brother. Pickford is the name used by the family for all purposes now, although originally the name was Smith. Olive Thomas has been Mrs. Jack Pickford more than a year. Thomas Meighan is the husband of Frances Ring, a regular stage actress and a sister of Blanche Ring.

A READER—"The Neglected Wife" contest winners were: First prize, $1000, Mrs. Louis Detlefs, Cleveland, Ohio; second prize, $500, Miss Anna B. Gordon, Norwood, Pa. Five prizes of $100 each were awarded to Mrs. D. C. Cameron, Nevada; Mrs. F. A. Dow, Massachusetts; Frank Hoffman, Pennsylvania; Claire Palmer, Indiana, and Mrs. Helen S. Paxton, New Jersey.

M. W. R.—The Fox Film Company, 130 West Forty-sixth street, New York, is the place to send your manuscript. Triangle Company, Culver City, Cal.; Lasky, Hollywood, Cal., and Universal Film Company, Universal City, Cal., occasionally buy photoplays from free lance writers.

HOLKAMP—Taylor Holmes is with Essenay, Chicago, Ill. He is being featured in comedy-dramas—sort of taking the place of Bryant Washburn, who left Essenay recently to join Pathe. Holmes is married and is just a little over the draft age.

Don't blame your relations-in-law if they don't like you. They are not responsible for you.